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AUTHOR Atwater, Deborah F.
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ABSTRACT

Intended to enhance adult leadership skills, the 4-H Debate Project, developed by the 4-H Communication Committee of Delaware County (Pennsylvania), was designed to (1) increase the members' knowledge of library skills through research, (2) make them aware of current issues, (3) help them to become better public speakers and communicators, (4) give them opportunities to express themselves on certain issues, (5) enable them to resolve conflicts creatively through discussion, and (6) make them aware of the necessity and the rewards of working with others toward a common goal. Using a modified version of the parliamentary style of debate, the affirmative and negative sides can have more than the traditional members of a debating squad. The topics selected for debate are developed from discussions that occur during club meetings or gatherings that young people might attend. Manuals for members, leaders, and judges guarantee that those with little or no background in debate can successfully organize and conduct this project. In one debate between two classes of elementary school children, judging was handled by three seniors enrolled in a learning enrichment program. In this way, young children, teenagers, and the adult leaders became involved in the communication project. (HOD)

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The 4-H Debate Project: Getting Adults and Children Involved in Communication

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Deborah F. Atwater, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Speech Communication
The Pennsylvania State University
Delaware County Campus
25 Yearsley Mill Road
Media, Pennsylvania 19063
(215) 565-3300

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Major concerns of 4-H staff workers are increasing participation in the organizatior. and obtaining adult leadership. 4-H projects have always been ways of achieving these goals. After months of research and careful planning, the 4-H Communication Committee of Delaware County in Pennsylvania, developed the 4-H Debate Project, a comprehensive communication project.

Why Debate?

Generally speaking, all children and adults need to be able to communicate with clarity, to articulate ideas, to reason, and to separate key facts from the barrage of ideas we all are exposed to everyday. No single activity can prepare one better for this than debating. Debating increases your ability to think on your feet, to form logical conclusions, and to answer questions logically and with clarity.

Debate should be viewed as humanistic education and children should be encouraged to develop positive attitudes toward the worth of ideas, themselves, others and society-at-large. Through debate, the attitudes of open-mindedness, fairness, and tolerance for the viewpoints of others may be acquired.

The Goals of the Project

According to Mager, it is necessary "to identify goals and then describe specific outcomes that will cause you to agree that the goal is achieved."[1] The communication committee developed the following goals for the 4-H Debate Project:

1. Increase the members' knowledge of library skills through research.
2. Make the members aware of current issues.
3. Help the member to become a better public speaker and communicator.
4. Give the member an opportunity to express himself/herself on certain issues.
5. Enable the member to resolve conflicts creatively through discussion.
6. Make the member aware of the necessity and the rewards of working with others toward a common goal.[2]

The Project

The 4-H Debate Project utilizes a modified version of the parliamentary style of debate. This type of debate allows for greater member participation. The affirmative and negative side can have more than the traditional members of a debating squad, which is usually two affirmative speakers and two negative speakers. After doing adequate research on the topic, the following format is used. The time limits are merely suggestions and can be modified to suit individual club needs.

I. Introduction

First affirmative speaker	4 minutes
First negative speaker	4 minutes

II. Body

Alternating speakers from each side 2 minutes each, including interruptions	18 minutes total

(Legal interruptions are point of information to clarify an argument and objection about incorrect facts or misleading information.)

III. Summary

Negative speaker	2 minutes
Affirmative speaker	2 minutes
	30 minutes total[3]

All members from each side must speak at least once.

Possible Topics for the Project

The topic selected for debate should be interesting, timely, controversial, and within the ability of the debaters. For example,

1. Movie ratings
2. Career women
3. Television violence
4. Teen-age alcoholism
5. Discipline in schools
6. Competition and awards
7. F.D.A.'s ban on specific items
8. Drug Abuse
9. Nuclear arms race
10. International terrorism

In addition, topics may be developed from discussion that might occur during a club meeting or any gathering which young people

might attend.

In order to implement the project, the committee decided that the participants needed a Members' Manual, Leaders' Manual, and Judges' Guide. By using the manuals, a leader with little or no background in debate can successfully organize and conduct this communication project. The Members' Manual includes goals, preparation for the debate, guidelines to record evidence, and a list of common errors. The Leaders' Manual provides information on how to select a debate topic and how to prepare club members for the actual debate. The Judges' Guide explains in detail the criteria used to evaluate the debate.

Evaluating the Project

Two classes of elementary school children from two different schools, who were enrolled in the learning enrichment program, debated the proposal, "Resolved, That Nuclear power should become our country's primary source for developing electricity in the future." After a lively debate of the proposition, judging of the debate was handled by three seniors enrolled in the learning enrichment program. In this way, young children, teenagers, and the adult leader(in this case a school teacher) became involved in the communication project.

Both members and leaders took part in an evaluation of the debate project. Most of the students had fun participating in the project and also learned a great deal about the subject.

As a result of information gained from the first debate evaluation, a page titled, " Helpful Tips for the Debater," was

added with special emphasis on how to deliver and present information during the debate along with basic public speaking principles.

Conclusion

This project can be used with any group of children and children need not be enrolled in advanced programs such as a learning enrichment program, in order to participate or benefit from the project.

By using the 4-H Debate Project, 4-H participation can be increased and effective adult leadership can be enhanced. This project can help to foster an enjoyable, positive learning experience for both adults and children. It definitely is a constructive way to get adults and children involved in communication.

Helpful Tips For The Debater

BEFORE THE DEBATE

1. Breathe deeply and slowly just before the debate. Remember to relax.
2. Make sure that all note cards are in order.
3. When introduced, smile, and look at the audience.
4. Know and understand your subject.

DURING THE DEBATE

1. Sit quietly, and pay attention to each debater's presentation.
2. Try to use words that create clear pictures.
3. Be specific, honest, simple, natural, and competitive.
4. Make sure the audience understands all terms related to the debate.
5. Use clear descriptions of unfamiliar terms.

AFTER THE DEBATE

1. Sit patiently and wait for the judge's decision.
2. Try to evaluate your own presentation.

DELIVERY

1. If you can, practice speaking on a tape recorder. Play it back yourself. See how many words you slur, mumble or mispronounce.
2. Always practice, but never memorize. Use of notecards should be kept to a minimum.
3. Stress the important issues by pausing and/or increasing your volume.
4. Gesture naturally, or not at all. Never force gestures.
5. Use vocal variety. Do not speak in a monotone.
6. Speak clearly, slowly, distinctly.
7. Make sure that you have adequate volume.
8. Remember to look at your audience, opponent, and judge--establish eye contact.
9. Watch nervous mannerisms, like playing with your hair, or tapping your pencil on the desk.
10. Remember to relax.

Footnotes

[1]Robert F. Mager, Goal Analysis(Belmont, California: Fearon Publishers/Lear Siegler, Inc., 1972), p. 11.

[2]Deborah F. Hunter et al. "4-H Debate Project: Members' Manual," Mimeographed(Media, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Cooperative Extension Service, 1978), p.1.

[3]Ibid., p. 3.